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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: PERES AND ABBAS VISITS IN PERSPECTIVE

REF: A. BRASILIA 1368
[1](#)B. BRASILIA 1112
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[1](#)D. BRASILIA 391

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Classified By: Charge D'Affaires Lisa Kubiske for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The November visits by Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, both shortly in advance of Iranian President Ahmadinejad's visit (ref A), led to few substantive results but helped Brazil craft its narrative as a hopeful emerging player in the Middle East. During the Abbas visit, President Lula made separate comments criticizing the U.S. role in the Middle East and arguing that the United Nations, not the United States, should play a mediating role in the region. The Israeli Embassy expressed satisfaction with the Peres visit but does not see Brazil as a viable neutral third party in the region, given the GOB's lack of regional knowledge and its lean against Israeli interests in efforts to accumulate supporters of a permanent Brazilian UN Security Council seat. Diplomats representing Israel/Palestine's neighbors with whom we have spoken welcome Brazil's interest in the region and generally support Brazil's goals, but see the current aggressive outreach as largely a product of Lula's strong presidency, and expect little from Brazil besides an emerging commercial relationship. End summary.

Brief Summary of Peres and Abbas Visits

[1](#)2. (SBU) In his November 11-12 visit to Brazil, Shimon Peres met separately with President Lula and Defense Minister Jobim, then addressed a joint session of Congress, before departing to Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro for meetings with business leaders (including Petrobras) and the Jewish community. Various minor commercial agreements were signed. In many ways the agenda for the visit -- the first by an Israeli president since 1966 -- mirrored the November 23 agenda of Ahmadinejad. Iran was a consistent topic of discussion in Peres' visits with Brazilian officials, businessmen and politicians. Local press coverage was relatively limited and highly favorable; nothing particularly interesting was said in the media during the visit.

[1](#)3. (C) President Lula met Palestinian President Abbas on October 20 in the state of Bahia on Brazil's northeastern coast. Abbas was warmly supportive of a Brazilian role in the Middle East peace process. In the Bahia press conference, Lula criticized the USG role in the region, saying, "As long as the United States is trying to negotiate peace in the Middle East there won't be peace...The one who

should oversee the negotiations is the United Nations, and that's why Brazil wants to reform the UN system." The following day he made similar comments blaming the United States for problems in the Middle East. Despite this, Lula's policy prescriptions for the region were nothing outside the mainstream, calling for a halt to new West Bank settlements (but not removal of existing ones), and preservation of current borders for a future Palestinian state. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE or Itamaraty) officials from both the Iran/Central Asia and Israel/Palestine desks later told poloff that Foreign Minister Amorim weighed in with Lula and his advisors right after the Abbas visit to get him to refrain from directly criticizing the United States or other countries by name during the Ahmadinejad visit. This effort apparently proved to be successful (ref A).

Israeli and other Perspectives

¶4. (C) Israeli Deputy Chief of Mission Raphael Singer told poloff November 27 that he was happy with the Peres visit outcomes, and content with the Abbas visit outcomes. Peres' joint session before Congress was a particular point of pride, since it was difficult to set up, drew several dozen sympathetic senators and deputies from a wide range of parties, and contrasted sharply with Ahmadinejad's relatively frosty courtesy call with the presidents of the Senate and Chamber of Deputies. He was also proud of setting up a widely run photo of Peres with soccer star Ronaldo. Singer acknowledged concerns about Lula's rhetoric during the Abbas visit but believed the visit was helpful at least to the extent that Abbas explained to Lula how Iranian assistance to Hamas and Hezbollah undermines his position and peace in the region generally. Media reports assert that Abbas pressed

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Lula to push Ahmadinejad to stop such assistance. (Comment: Previous poloff discussions with MRE indicate very little institutional Itamaraty understanding of Iran's role in Israel/Palestine/Lebanon. End comment.)

¶5. (C) The MRE Israel/Palestine desk officer offered general pleasantries about the visits and had no comment on President Lula's remarks in Bahia concerning the USG role in the Middle East. He told poloff that MRE has committed to providing additional support to the Palestinian Authority (PA), but allocation decisions won't be made until 2010. Singer told poloff that the Israeli Embassy has no problems with the GOB providing funding to the Palestinian Authority, but would appreciate advance consultation with MRE, which did not happen before Amorim's March announcement that Brazil would provide 20 million reais (then USD 10 million) to the PA (ref D).

Getting in the Game?

¶6. (C) Leading Brazilian officials, including Undersecretary Jaguaribe, have described -- to us and to other diplomatic missions -- their initiatives in the Middle East as an effort to "get in the game." Lula took that metaphor literally in meetings with his counterparts, frequently calling for a soccer game between Israelis, Palestinians, and Brazilians as a precursor to peace. Singer takes exception to Brazil's tendency to look at the Middle East through this prism, arguing that it underscores the point that Brazil's involvement has to do more with burnishing its own self-image than being an honest broker in the Middle East. While he describes Israel-Brazil relationships as amicable, Brazil's tendency to look at the region in terms of potential votes for a theoretical UN Security Council seat consistently puts them against Israeli interests. Peres, he said, was particularly annoyed with Lula's "unserious" response to Peres' inquiries about Brazil voting consistently for anti-Israel resolutions in the UN.

17. (C) Singer emphasized Brazil's lack of capacity in the region, a point also made by diplomats from neighboring states who are much more favorably inclined to Brazil's basic policy. The Jordanian DCM, who has been in Brasilia nearly three years, told poloff recently that he has never spoken Arabic with anyone at Itamaraty in a work situation and said he doesn't know of anyone in MRE not of Syrian-Lebanese Christian descent who can comfortably speak the language. (Note: MRE admits it has no Farsi speakers, and the Israeli Embassy counts one passable Hebrew speaker in MRE. End note.) There is also an awareness among many that Lula and his advisors in the Presidency are the driving force behind this effort, one that might have difficulty outlasting Lula's presidency. In a mid-November conversation with poloff, the Turkish Ambassador and DCM spoke in glowing terms of a recent Turkish congressional visit to Brazil and envisioned robust growth in Turkish-Brazilian commercial relations. They also talked about how Lula's personality draws world leaders into wanting a closer relationship, and joked about how there was no way that Lula's handpicked presidential candidate Dilma Rousseff could be able to project herself the same way in the region.

Comment

18. (C) The Israeli DCM told us that Brazil is "a long way from being a player in the Middle East." While that may be true, the package of presidential visits -- Peres, Abbas, Ahmadinejad -- helped Lula underscore his point both domestically and with certain Middle Eastern leaders that Brazil should be considered a rising player in the region. Return visits by Lula to Israel, Palestine, and Iran, all planned for roughly March-April 2010, will further advance his case. Lula's expectations are rising rapidly, as seen in his November 26 reply letter to President Obama, which includes demands to involve new players (Brazil) in Middle East peace negotiations. The GOB's Middle East strategy, designed to position Brazil as a "leader of the South" and one-day permanent UNSC member, has led Lula and his advisors to pick at minor policy differences rather than play an overtly supportive role of efforts by the major players. This was seen clearly in the Abbas visit, when Lula sharply criticized the USG, then laid out policy recommendations for Israel/Palestine essentially identical to our own. Moving forward, our lack of serious visible policy differences on Israel/Palestine suggests ample room for cooperation with

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Brazil, such as providing coordinated financial support to the PA for purposes of improving negotiation prospects. Unfortunately, the current Brazilian government may see the need to balance such coordination with needling statements aimed at maintaining its role as an independent player. End comment.
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